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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a realistic assessment of the pressures and problems facing college deans. Deans are in the position of having to deal with their faculty on one hand and the university administration on the other, placing them in the position of balancing interests and interpreting positions between two groups who often do not understand each other's problems. Negotiating skills are important in this position, and it is also important to keep an objective and balanced attitude. The relationship of a dean to his faculty is of basic importance in solving problems and conflicts. A continuing dialogue with the professors in his department and a mutual trust firmly established is one of the best bases for a dean to function from and a strong contributing factor to success in this position. (JD)

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Dean Power: Or, on Providing Good Reasons Why Someone Should Not Do Something

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Foreword

By way of introduction I would like to make two observations about this paper before starting -- first, the analysis of the obvious is very difficult, and second, it is easier to understand something than it is to change it. That is, just because we understand something does not mean that that understanding can be translated into action. One of the most frustrating aspects of deaning is the dissonance one must learn to live with because of the inability to translate understanding into action.

The author gratefully acknowledges the insightful and helpful comments of David H. Florio.

Until quite recently, social scientists have neglected systematic inquiries into the academic life and the problems of academic administration. Now, following nearly a decade of unsettling changes in higher education, so much is being written about the university professor and the academic administrator that it is difficult to review adequately all the published material. But current literature does indicate that very little of this research contributes substantively to the development of theory capable of guiding practice. This is not to deny the value of what a number of investigators have been and are currently doing; it is rather a caution. There is simply little warranted knowledge about the genus, academic dean.

Today, four of us, deans of education representing four different institutions, are presenting our views. Two of us are with public institutions, two with private. Two institutions have a reputation for their emphasis on education research; two are known for their orientation toward teaching and service to inner city clients. Each of the four deans uses analytical skills and strategies for identifying and solving problems. Each recognizes that the tools of analysis that are employed must match his institution's ethos and his own personal style and pattern of managerial activities.

Jim March, in an excellent paper[1], discusses his ideas about management in educational institutions. He describes decision making as involving five analytical skills that are linked to the things that managers do.

Because of the severe limitation on our time I will concentrate on discussing one analytical skill that March has identified -- the analysis of coalitions -- the management of conflict. I have chosen to concentrate

[1]March, James. Analytical Skills and the University Training of Educational Administrators. A paper read at the Seventh Annual Walter D. Cocking Memorial Lecture. Bellingham, Washington, August 16, 1973.

on this particular skill because as the first dean of a new college of education I have spent a considerable amount of time trying to make practical application of it.

I will discuss three functionally interdependent components associated with building political coalitions: (1) persuasion and bargaining; (2) the conditions under which bargaining takes place; (3) credibility and the exercise of authority.

I would like, however, to add a disclaimer here -- although I propose to deal with the analytical skill associated with the management of conflict, it is important that my comments be viewed in a broader perspective. That is, deans lead and sometimes follow; deans may or may not respond to disorder and conflict by seeking to make sense out of divergent views; and deans do not necessarily equate conflict with pathology. My intention is to discuss a skill that draws much of its substantive character from the discipline of political science. It is not my intention, however, to convey the impression that a dean (or any administrative leadership position) is entirely concerned with political matters. Political concerns are commonplace to deaning, but are by no means the only matters that count.

Depending on the issues involved, a dean is either persuading an individual or a group of individuals to do something or not to do something. It isn't very often that a dean can remain neutral. As Dante said, "there is a special place in Hell reserved for those who, in time of crisis, try to remain neutral."

It has been my observation that a dean often spends as much time trying to persuade his own faculty as he does the central university administration. Few faculty members realize the bind in which deans often find themselves -- on the one hand they are line administrators and on the other, they must

demonstrate their loyalty to their academic division and represent that unit to the University administration. It is as important to spend time communicating with one's colleagues as it is dealing with members of the central administration.

Depending on the ethos of the institution, the administration is often characterized as either "gatekeeping" or "facilitating." It has been my experience that faculty rarely think of administrators -- especially deans -- as facilitators. This is unfortunate because it establishes role expectations which are often detrimental to successful management of conflict. Hence the rather pessimistic title of my paper. Otherwise it could have been called -- Dean Power: Or, on providing good reasons why someone should do something.

Obviously, effective communication skills are essential to management of conflict and building of coalitions. Even the best efforts will not be effective unless all parties are informed about the issues, are able to talk with one another and understand that continued dialogue will be productive. Once people stop talking or are systematically excluded from discussions, the task of building coalitions becomes almost impossible.

Persuasion is probably the most important interpersonal tool a dean has available to help build coalitions and reduce and/or increase conflict. Persuasion is really a form of bargaining, and bargaining is a distinctly political process.

Bargaining as a means of building coalitions is an incredibly complex phenomenon. I don't understand it well, but I will try to convey some things I have learned.

When successful bargaining has not required direct negotiation, it might be said that a dean has usually been effective in exerting his influence.

When bargaining does involve negotiation, agreements usually result. Agreements can be either explicit or implicit. Higher education is famous for its explicit bargaining. Explicit agreements are documented through blizzards of memoranda which find their way into each of our lives.

Sometimes, however, a dean must take a kind of action which can best be described as a form of non-negotiated bargaining. When a dean acts without regard for the consequences, without involving other decision makers or asking faculty opinion, such action is called unilateral action. Faculty and the university administration expect to be consulted before most actions are taken, and they should be consulted. When they are not, it is a rare event. Perhaps this is why deans, when asked how they are, say, "I'll let you know after I've checked with the full professors."

Every dean can be thought of as having an inventory of credibility "blue chips." Deans who take unilateral action are expending these blue chips with their colleagues and the university administration. Taking action without allowing others the opportunity for dialogue is a risky business, and it rapidly depletes the stock of credibility chips.

There are other forms of bargaining which involve more direct negotiation between two or more people. For example, "logrolling[2]." This is the type of bargaining in which "you give me what I want, and I'll give you what you want." There is a form of logrolling which includes a time variable. The sense of the bargain is "you support me now, and I'll support you some time in the future." Then, of course, there is compromise. Compromise takes the general form, "you want A, I want C, let's settle on B." Finally, there is the kind of bargaining which is called "side-payment."

[2] Froman, Lewis. The Congressional Process. Boston. Little Brown and Co., 1967.

It takes the form of, "you support me and I will reward you" or alternatively, "you support me or else I will punish you."

In order to bargain effectively, one must develop an understanding about the conditions under which various types of bargaining take place. For purposes of discussion, I shall briefly discuss six types.

The first kind of condition under which bargaining takes place is the routine condition. An organization usually has developed relatively standard and routine ways of handling issues which must be dealt with frequently. Similarly, people in administrative positions usually have developed ways of handling problems which repeatedly come across their desks. Hence it is important to determine what are the expectations and routine in the institution for handling recurring problems. There is also the problem, when new to the job, of determing what, in fact, is a routine problem.

The second type of condition under which bargaining takes place is concerned with structure. Highly structured decision-making units -- like the faculty council, standing committees, the full professors -- require a different kind of attention than decentralized decision-making units such as admission committees, advisory boards, and ad hoc committees.

Status is the third condition which affects bargaining. The more resources one has at his disposal, the better able he is to bargain. For example, a department chairperson has more resources and status than an instructor. The president of the faculty senate has more resources than a newly appointed standing-committee member. And there is, of course, the full professor who has more resources than a dean. Be that as it may, the variables of status and resources need to be taken into account when bargaining -- especially if a compromise has to be effected, and it is impor-

tant that nobody loses face or appears to have given up resources over which he has control.

A fourth condition is personality. The personalities of the individuals involved in decision making and coalition building play an important role in the bargaining process. For example, there are some individuals who simply cannot be trusted to keep a bargain. Those who cannot be trusted to keep a bargain often engage in a game called "so long sucker." They will enter into a bargain and then when it suits them back out of it by entering into a coalition with another group and/or individual. There are others who have strong ideological positions and thus find it very difficult to compromise. Individuals with strong ideological positions usually stand on principle, and unless they are willing to say "you give me what I want, and I'll give you what you want," one does not make much progress.

There are situations where decision making and bargaining are linked to the variable of time. Certain kinds of bargaining go on before other types of bargaining are employed. In this kind of time-sequenced situation, everyone is willing to give in a little in order to get something, but not without a fight and certainly not without a reduction in status. Collective bargaining negotiations are an excellent example of this type of time related bargaining.

The sixth and last condition is concerned with the nature of the issue involved. There are a number of ways in which issues may be distinguished. The characteristic which is of primary concern to a dean, however, is the extent to which opposition to a given issue might be generated. For example, an issue sometimes is labeled as "a hot potato" because it is assumed that it will polarize faculty opinion. The potency of an issue will determine to a significant degree the process of bargaining and, hence, the ability

to manage conflict.

A distinction should be made between external and internal issues. External issues lie outside of the college and usually involve a threat to programs or college budget. The dean's responsibility in handling external issues is to define and present them to the faculty for their analysis and recommendation. Internal issues usually involve conflict about status, personality and realignment of groups within the college. The technology of bargaining varies as a result of whether an issue is viewed as an external or internal problem.

Further, a dean needs to be sensitive to political coalitions which he enters into as a representative of his institution. For example, a dean has a responsibility to represent his institution to policy makers at the federal and state levels as well as within various professional organizations. In this effort a dean must continually communicate with his faculty about how he is trying to represent their interests while, at the same time, managing conflict and forming coalitions with external groups and related publics.

Given the external vs. internal division of issues, there are times when a dean, just as he can be squeezed between the central administration and his faculty, can be in conflict with his faculty and any number and/or combination of external groups -- including other deans of education. Time does not permit detailed exploration of this area. I believe, however, that it deserves further attention.

A dean has considerable authority which accrues as a consequence of the way his role is defined. How he exercises his authority, however, will determine whether or not he will be able to maintain it. For example, the side-payment form of bargaining has the potential for creating problems

for a dean. Although it is a bit simplistic, most individuals tend to view people as either angels or devils. Good people are rewarded, and bad people are punished. If a dean divides the world into those who are for him and those who are against him, he will find it difficult not to exercise his authority to reward or punish people depending upon his personal feelings about them. Such behavior is, obviously, unfair and runs contrary to our values. This leads me to another concern -- the history and current status of the reward structure of institutions.

The faculty and the university administration expect a dean to bestow rewards in a manner consistent with the ethos of the institution. A working understanding of the reward structure of the institution is essential to building effective political coalitions and to the management of conflict.

As mentioned previously, a dean can be thought of as having an inventory of blue credibility chips. When rewards or punishments are meted out inappropriately, more credibility is lost. The power to reward must be used wisely, and a dean must learn, if he does not know it beforehand, that what people admire most about power is the restraint with which it is used. Whenever "dean power" is employed -- through persuasion or reward -- the potential for losing blue chips is present. When a dean's store of credibility chips is depleted, his effectiveness and ability to lead are seriously diminished.

The problem of a dean's credibility is complex. Credibility is related to such matters as reputation, trust, honesty, etc. It is my hunch that the smaller the number of blue chips a dean has spent, the greater the value of each chip remaining in the stack. When those are needed, they will be worth more. That is, chips kept in your possession grow in value.

It is possible that blue chips can increase in number and value when a dean adds a new faculty member to the staff. New faculty, however, can be both a liability and an asset. On the one hand, they tend to be more likely to support the leadership efforts of a dean to build coalitions. On the other hand, they sometimes are viewed as agents of change by the faculty and hence may serve to create problems which make bargaining more difficult.

The addition of new faculty members to a staff has, over the years, been viewed as a vehicle for developing new programs -- a source of vital energy for helping to move programs into the future. Given the fact that education is a declining industry, the degrees of budgetary freedom for hiring new faculty have been significantly reduced. The result is increased pressure on the dean to energize faculty to review program priorities while, at the same time, he must cope with difficulties associated with developing coalitions which recognize the realities of our current economic climate. Establishing program priorities and monitoring precious economic resources is a relatively new problem for deans of education. Over the last decade, deans have had significant degrees of freedom to add to staff and thereby expand or build or continue support of programs. The faculty -- individually and collectively -- benefitted from these efforts in a variety of ways which tended to enhance the dean's blue chip stock.

Unfortunately the opportunity for stock dividends that can be paid for by previous affluence has declined. As a consequence, deans must develop conflict management skills and create political coalitions without the assistance and support of new faculty and the fiscal resources which were available in abundance several years ago.

Deans need assistance in thinking through the art of bargaining under conditions of limited resources, for example, to deal with the problem of

how to bring together individuals who may have not talked with one another for years, or who are, at best, terribly resistent to efforts to form new coalitions. The management of conflict with limited resources and the lack of new actors who serve to stimulate change is a new set of circumstances to be dealt with in the development of political coalitions in colleges of education. This reality has presented deans with all sorts of vexing problems and will continue to do so. This is an area of inquiry which merits attention.

In the last analysis, management of conflict is related to the ability of a dean to cope with conflict. Deans are only human; they, like everyone else, respond from their strengths and weaknesses, pride and prejudices, to new facts and old, with passions and dispassions, with affection and enmity. Most try to be fair and humane. It is hard, but many succeed.

In my judgment, where deans have the most difficulty, however, is in the area of feelings they have about and the quality of attention they pay to individual members of the faculty. Most deans, for example, find it very difficult to work with a faculty member whom they feel to be incompetent. It is difficult for a dean to communicate to such an individual that he/she is wanted and valued as a person, regardless of his or her professional deficiencies. It takes a tremendous amount of psychological energy to learn to identify positive characteristics with individuals who one feels are not doing their jobs well. It takes even more energy and a considerable amount of interpersonal skill to communicate to such individuals what things about them are liked, valued, and respected.

As mentioned previously, bargaining assumes that good communication exists between the parties involved. There are two contrasting types of

communication, two different predominant modes of communication among faculty, administration, and students. These are negotiation and dialogue. Negotiation is a means of coming to terms, conferring with the aim of arriving at a basis for agreement. Dialogue means "conversation." In the context of this discussion, it is important to note that negotiation does not presuppose trust between the parties engaged in bargaining.

People involved in negotiation start from prepared positions and usually give ground when that will serve their essentially political ends. Negotiation, then, limits choices and narrows the range of action between the bargaining parties. The quality of communication between individuals who are negotiating, who view themselves as part of a political interaction, has significant implications for the verbal and the cognitive behavior, and even the life style, that the negotiator develops.

In contrast to negotiation, where the areas of discussion and ranges of choice are narrowed, dialogue is intended to widen the areas under discussion, exploring them completely. A precondition of dialogue is trust -- at least enough trust between the participants to permit them to expose their reasoning to the critical review of others as well as to re-examine it themselves. The personal relationships, the interactions between the participants in a dialogue differ significantly from the relationship between the parties to negotiation. Where there is fear of exposing one's view to criticism or unwillingness to explore other possibilities, the bargaining process is likely to be negotiation rather than dialogue. If negotiation becomes the major mode of communication for a dean, serious problems are likely to result. For example, if faculty generally communicate with a dean through negotiation, it is probably because there has been a covert, but nonetheless critical, break in trust and shared assumptions; differences

are not openly discussed and mutually explored. There are all sorts of hazards for the dean, faculty and students in such a setting.

When negotiation is the principal means of communication, the essential humanness of the interaction between the negotiating parties may well be denied. For example, when negotiation is "formalized," attorneys are often present. As a result, both of the negotiating parties become more vulnerable in a special sense. They may hold more tightly to their own frame of reference, to their own view of the situation, and ignore the complexity of the content in which they are operating. The possibilities for mixed messages, for anger, and for a law suit are increased significantly. In such a situation, where the bargaining parties are unable to examine their frame of reference, it is difficult to achieve desirable results. This re-examination is vital to effective administration.

It is a dean's responsibility to involve his colleagues in dialogue -- to involve them with educational tasks. The extent to which faculty and the dean will be able to put their own egos on the line will be a function, to a significant degree, of the trust and alliance with each other which have been developed. That is, whether the dean has established a climate that is oriented toward dialogue and values it over negotiation. This is a significant burden for a dean. It is no simple task to work out the logistics of providing the conditions for dialogue.

I have confined this paper to a discussion of the skills associated with the successful management of conflict. March has identified four other analytical skills needed by managers, and these also merit consideration and reflection. They are:

1. The analysis of expertise. The management of knowledge.
2. The analysis of ambiguity. The management of goals.
3. The analysis of time. The management of attention.

4. The analysis of information. The management of inference.

Each of these skills is related to the common tasks of managerial life; each involves a technology of analysis and thought. Each is essential to problem solving.

In closing, I would remind you of H. L. Mencken's comment that there is always an easy answer to every human problem . . . simple, plausible, and wrong. As you are all aware, the problems which deans of education face these days are far from easy. Nor are the solutions simple. No one strategy fits every problem. According to Richard Brautigan, "there are seductions that should be in the Smithsonian Institute, right next to the 'Spirit of St. Louis'." I urge you to keep Mencken's and Brautigan's comments in mind as you think about and try to apply decision-making theory to the problems of administration and research.